

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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Statement on HB 2826, Children Advocacy Centers

February 10, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair Leif, Vice-Chair Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in ministry together creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world.

EMO strongly supports HB 2826, which will increase funding to children advocacy centers (CACs). This bill will provide critical funding to match the demand for the essential services that CACs provide to children across Oregon.

Supporting this investment in adequate youth crisis services encompasses our values affirming the right of each person to be free from domestic violence and any form of abuse and our core belief in cultivating family and community well-being.

Oregon's CACs play a critical role in minimizing trauma for children when there are concerns of abuse, providing services such as medical exams, forensic interviews and follow-up treatment to kids who have been victimized, or who were witness to a crime. A lack of access to these services can lead to children receiving less specialized and trauma informed care at a much higher cost. Further, CACs provide several statutorily mandated services that are important for the legal assessment of a child's circumstances. Therefore, when children are unable to access CACs for these services, for example child abuse assessments, DHS caseworkers are forced to make placement decisions without complete and vital information. This can result in children being left in unsafe situations or creating unnecessary family separation.

Currently, due to a lack of adequate funding, children advocacy centers cannot address the extent of the needs of children throughout the state. This has only been made worse due to Covid-19, leading to 45% of the children who were referred to a CAC from January to November last year not being served. This means that 2,529 children were left behind; Oregon needs to do better. Every family and child deserve equal opportunities to safety and security and this bill will help ensure that.

Advocating for survivors of domestic violence as well as resources for underserved youth is at the forefront of EMO's community service work, as seen through EMO's Russian Oregon Social Services (ROSS) and Second Home programs. Our experience at ROSS providing services for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence has shown us the importance of investing in resources that cultivate safety and community to create long-term partnerships of trust and support. Through EMO's Second Home program we've seen firsthand how abuse is a key driver of youth homelessness, emphasizing how absolutely necessary it is to

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invest in youth services that provide children with agency and the support they need to be healthy and successful.

We urge you to support HB 2826 and join us in serving and investing in the safety and well-being of our communities. As people of faith, we believe that a healthy society provides for the well-being of all, and this includes ensuring the protection of all children. We join the voices of Oregon Child Abuse Solutions to insist that the state invest in our children's safety.

Sincerely,

Ella Burke
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon